

Writing:

→ Bring a printed, complete draft of your college essay to the first day of English 12.

Reading:

→ Choose a text of any genre about **the natural world**. Please read, annotate, and even journal about your reading. Come prepared to discuss and write about your text. Bring your text to the first day of English 12.

You may choose from the faculty and staff recommendations below or make a different selection. Please do **NOT** choose from the short list of texts in the senior curriculum:

- PSU Challenge History of Modern Europe: *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley
- Texts for English 12: *No Country for Eight-Spot Butterflies* by Julian Aguan; *The Home Place* by Drew Lanham; *Holy the Firm* by Annie Dillard; *The Way to Rainy Mountain* by N. Scott Momaday
- Text for Theology: *Rooted* by Lyanda Lynn Haupt; *God's Hotel* by Victoria Sweet

Faculty and Staff Text Recommendations

Courtney Best

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life by Barbara Kingsolver

If you could pick only one food that did not grow in the PNW that you could not live without for a whole year, what would it be? Bananas? Coffee? Would you be able to live off of foods that you grew at your house or made in your kitchen for a whole year? This book reminds us of our deep connection with food, where it comes from, and how easily we can access it.

Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert by Terry Tempest Williams

In this potent collage of stories, essays, and testimony, Williams makes a stirring case for preserving America's Redrock Wilderness in the canyon country of southern Utah. As passionate as she is persuasive, Williams, the beloved author of *Refuge*, is one of the country's most eloquent and imaginative writers. The desert is her blood. Here she writes lyrically about the desert's power and vulnerability, describing wonders that range from an ancient Puebloan sash of macaw feathers found in Canyonlands National Park to the desert tortoise—an animal that can “teach us the slow art of revolutionary patience” as it extends our notion of kinship

with all life. She examines the civil war being waged in the West today over public and private uses of land—an issue that divides even her own family. With grace, humor, and compassionate intelligence, Williams reminds us that the preservation of wildness is not simply a political process but a spiritual one.

Caitlin Whitty

The Great Alone by Kristin Hannah

This page-turning coming-of-age novel includes a unique love story and the ripple effects of war and PTSD on a family. It introduces the reader to the beauty and danger of the Alaskan wilderness.

Maura Timoney-Deville

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Author Robin Wall Kimmerer is known for teaching “Traditional Ecological Knowledge,” a practice combining scientific observation with cultural and spiritual knowledge. *Braiding Sweetgrass* became a bestseller despite originally being released only by a small nonprofit publisher. The book primarily focuses on the state of the contemporary world, but it also draws deeply from Indigenous American history and traditions. It also centers on the history of Onondaga Lake, which was a sacred place to the people of the Onondaga Nation and part of their territory until it was seized by the state of New York in 1788.

Cynthia Berger

The Memory of an Elephant by Alex Lasker

This book really gave me a deeper appreciation for elephants and protecting them.

Ellie Gilbert

The Language of Trees: A Rewilding of Literature and Landscape by Katie Holten

It is exquisitely written, highly accessible, and has something for every reader: science, storytelling, nature, poetry, essays, song lyrics, recipes, and quotations... it is a wonder- and a total breath of fresh air.

Maria Fleming

Migrations by Charlotte McConaghy

In *Migrations*, the protagonist Franny Stone loves birds with a rare passion. She deceptively gains passage on an illegal fishing boat searching for one more catch. The eclectic crew, though wary and weary, take on Franny and her mission as they learn of her past and secrets. This book shows how our internal struggles are mirrored in the natural world. The audiobook is highly recommended.

Found by Joseph Bruchac (Nulhegan Abenaki)

Nick, an Abenaki teen who is on his way to work at a First Nations summer youth nature camp, encounters a stranger on a train who ends up chasing him through the wilderness. In this thriller, Nick puts his knowledge of natural history and outdoor survival to use as he attempts to evade his pursuer. His ingenuity, appreciation of the beauty of the natural world, and connection to the grandparents who taught him critical skills make the story relevant for people who want to ground themselves in the goodness and wonder of the natural world.

Kathy Briggs

Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens

From Ms. Briggs: Beautiful art? A heartbreaking story of resilience? Feminist strength? The deep love of nature? Powerful kindness? Coming-of-age romance? All of this, plus a murder mystery with an intense courtroom trial? This beautiful book has it all! One of my all-time favorite books.

Ashley Whitty

The Overstory by Richard Powers

This is a story about trees, humans, and their complex relationship. Winner of the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, this gorgeous, complex, and heartbreaking novel will change how you see trees forever.

Joan Nyland

The Solace of Open Spaces by Gretel Ehrlich

The book is about a documentary filmmaker from the East Coast who goes out to Wyoming to make a film about the last of the cowboys. She ends up staying in Wyoming while she recovers from a tragic death and works through a period of grief. It is a poetic recount of the power of open skies, fields of grass, and a quieter rural part of the West and its healing powers.

Carrie Housley

The Dirty Life: A Memoir of Farming, Food and Love by Kristin Kimball

New York writer Kristin Kimball is the type who has nothing but take-out containers and a Britta water filter in her refrigerator until she sets out to interview Mark, an ambitious young farmer. No, this isn't a romance novel; it's a true story of how Kimball, on a whim, moves to five hundred acres near Lake Champlain to be part of Mark's grand experiment: to create a farm capable of feeding an entire community. This is the chronicle of Kristin's year as she falls in love, both with the man and the farm-to-table lifestyle.

Jim Haster

The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate by Peter Wohlleben

Peter Wohlleben is a German forester and it is in this capacity that he uses his personal observations and scientific discoveries to tell the reader about the social network of trees – their communications with each other and their support and protection of the tree community. Compelling reading.

Kirk Ellis

Silent Spring by Rachel Carson

A classic. A seminal work in environmental studies. This book is a deep meditation on the destructive effects caused by the use of pesticides. Published in 1962, it influenced the banning of DDT and helped to change environmental law. Beautifully written, and poetic at times, Carson shows us that not enough has changed in the treatment of our natural resources in the past 60 years.

Anne Hainley

Far From the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy

If you are looking for a late 19th-century novel about rural farming life and romance, this could be the book for you. Bathsheba Everdene inherits a farm from her uncle. Gabriel Oak loses his flock of sheep in an accident. William Boldwood pursues the sender of a mysterious valentine. Meanwhile, the landscape of rural England almost becomes a character in this drama of love, longing, betrayal, and heartache. From bringing in the hay to tending sick sheep, to valentines sealed with wax, this novel has it all.

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek by Annie Dillard

Twelve chapters, set over the course of the year, chronicle Dillard's "theodicy" at the edge of Tinker Creek in rural Virginia. Winner of the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for Nonfiction, *Pilgrim* explores the intersection of what we see, what we believe, what we know, and what is. Rooted in observation of the natural world—from the muskrats and the praying mantises to the slant of light and the torn leaves by Tinker Creek in Pennsylvania, Dillard's prose seeks connection and understanding.

Julia Stadler

Into Thin Air by Jon Krakauer

A nonfiction account of the Everest disaster; person vs person; person vs. environment. So many unreliable narrators! Engaging prose.

Strange Harvest: The Hidden Histories of Seven Natural Objects by Edward Posnett

A nonfiction text that discusses the natural object itself, its history, and how it has been commodified. This text leaves the reader to ponder all of the "should" questions around it.

Liz Olufson

You Are Here: Poetry In the Natural World edited Ada Limon

Ada Limon is the current Poet Laureate of the United States. In this 2024 collection, Limon and other accomplished poets explore their connections to the natural world. It's filled with beautiful and evocative poetry that transports the reader to the natural landscapes and memories that helped shape these writers as artists.

Wolfish by Erica Bery

This is an amazing essay collection by a Portland-based author and writing teacher. The collection centers around Oregon's wild wolf OR-7 and delves into humanity's animal nature as it explores fear, grief, and womanhood.

Kate Damon

Piranesi by Susanna Clarke

I read this book in 2020, and haven't stopped thinking about it since! In this fantasy novel, Piranesi wanders through an endless labyrinthine mansion full of waves, birds, and marble statues, only encountering one other human, The Other. Clarke examines how nature and society shape us in different and sometimes conflicting ways, as Piranesi slowly uncovers the mystery of his identity and the world beyond the labyrinth.